Bangladesh refuse to go to India for T20 World Cup

DHAKA: Bangladesh will not travel to India to play in next month's T20 World Cup, its cricket board said on Thursday, effectively ruling the country out of the tournament.

"Our only demand is to play the World Cup — but not in India," Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) President Aminul Islam Bulbul told reporters.

The refusal came a day after cricket's governing body rejected Bangladesh's plea to play its games in Sri Lanka instead.

"There is no scope for changing our decision," said Asif Nazrul, an adviser for youth and sports issues in Bangladesh's interim government.

The T20 World Cup begins on February 7, with Bangladesh scheduled to play their four group matches in the Indian cities of Kolkata and Mumbai.

The row between the neighbouring nations erupted on January 3 when the Indian cricket board ordered the Indian Premier League (IPL) franchise Kolkata Knight Riders to release Bangladesh fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman.

Mustafizur's removal from the IPL followed online outrage by right-wing Indian Hindus who invoked alleged attacks on a fellow community in Muslim-majority Bangladesh.

Dhaka maintains that Indian media had exaggerated the scale of the violence.

The sport's global governing body said on Wednesday it had "engaged with the BCB in sustained and constructive dialogue" to ensure Bangladesh could participate in the tournament, but added that those efforts had been "rebuffed".

The International Cricket Council (ICC) said "independent security assessments, comprehensive venue-level security plans and formal assurances from the host authorities" found there was "no credible or verifiable threat to the safety" of the Bangladesh team.

'LOSE A HUGE AUDIENCE'

However, Nazrul said Bangladesh's security concerns "did not arise from speculation or theoretical analysis".

"They arose from a real incident — where one of our country's top players was forced to bow to extremists, and the Indian cricket board asked him to leave India," he said.

Bangladesh will hold elections during the World Cup, its first since a mass uprising in 2024 toppled then-prime minister Sheikh Hasina, a close ally of New Delhi.

Political relations have since soured between Bangladesh and India, where Hasina fled after she was ousted.

There are wider issues for India, which is preparing to host the 2030 Commonwealth Games that are seen as a stepping stone for its ambitions to host the 2036 Olympics.

"Bangladesh is a cricket-loving nation. If a country of nearly 200 million people misses the World Cup, the ICC will lose a huge audience," the BCB's Bulbul said. "Cricket is entering the Olympics in 2028, Brisbane in 2032, India is bidding for 2036. Excluding a major cricket-loving country like Bangladesh would be a failure."

Bangladesh's appeal to the ICC was not without precedent, with India's arch-enemy Pakistan to play all its games in Sri Lanka.

That deal was struck after India, a financial and administrative powerhouse within cricket, refused to travel to Pakistan for the 2025 Champions Trophy and played its matches in Dubai instead.

However, the ICC said a year later a similar shift was impossible for Bangladesh.

"There are many precedents worldwide where matches have been moved to other venues due to security risks," Bangladesh's Nazrul said.

ICC sources told AFP this week that Bangladesh could be replaced by Scotland, the highest-ranked team that did not qualify outright for the World Cup.—AFP

Sameer, Ali star as Pakistan U-19 make Super Six stage

HARARE: An unbeaten half-century by Sameer Minhas and a three-wicket haul from Ali Raza guided Pakistan to a comprehensive eight-wicket victory over Zimbabwe in the U-19 World Cup on Thursday as the side sealed a spot in the Super Six stage.

At the Takashinga Sports Club in Harare, Pakistan opt to field first and struck early to put Zimbabwe on the back foot.

Wicket-keeper Hamza Zahoor pulled off a sharp diving catch to his right to dismiss Kian Blignaut off Ali's bowling before captain Farhan Yousaf produced a brilliant effort in the field, diving to his right to remove Zimbabwe's top-scorer Nathaniel Hlabangana, who made 59 off 85 balls with seven fours and a six.

Ali, who had taken four wickets in the previous match against Scotland, once again led the attack, finishing with figures of three for 16 in eight overs. He accounted for Kupakwashe Muradzi, Blignaut and later Brandon Senzere.

Fast bowlers Abdul Subhan and Mohammad Sayyam claimed two wickets apiece, while left-arm spinner Momin Qamar also chipped in with two as Zimbabwe were bundled out for 128 in 35.5 overs.

Pakistan chased down the modest target in 26.2 overs with little trouble. Sameer anchored the innings with an unbeaten 74 off 75 balls, striking six fours and three sixes. He shared a 49-run stand for the second wicket with Usman Khan, who scored a brisk 26.

Ahmed Hussain remained not out on 24 as Pakistan reached the target with 142 balls to spare.

"After getting out early in my previous innings, my focus today was to spend time at the crease, keep things simple and trust my basics," Sameer said after the match. "Our fielding and bowling were very encouraging and a big positive for us.

"The Super Six stage will be challenging with quality teams and two crucial matches. Our aim will be to win with a healthy net run-rate, which will be vital heading into the semi-finals."—Agencies

SA pick Stubbs, Rickelton for T20 World Cup

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa have been forced into two changes to their batting stocks for next month's T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka after injured duo Tony de Zorzi and Donovan Ferreira withdrew, while David Miller will also face a fitness test.

Ryan Rickelton and Tristan Stubbs have been called up as replacements for De Zorzi (hamstring) and Ferreira (clavicle fracture), after their original omission from the squad had raised plenty of eyebrows when it was announced.

Miller has an adductor muscle injury and is ruled out of the three-match T20 International home series against West Indies that starts on Tuesday, but could yet recover in time for the World Cup.

Rubin Hermann, who has been in excellent form in the ongoing SA20 tournament, will replace Miller in the squad for the West Indies series.

South Africa open their World Cup campaign against Canada in Ahmedabad on Feb 9, and also play Afghanistan, New Zealand and the UAE in their pool.

Updated squad: Aiden Markram (captain), Corbin Bosch, Dewald Brevis, Quinton de Kock, Marco Jansen, George Linde, Keshav Maharaj, Kwena Maphaka, Lungi Ngidi, Anrich Nortje, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Jason Smith, Tristan Stubbs, David Miller (Subject to fitness test).—Reuters

CANADA'S Denis Shapovalov hits a return against Marin Cilic of Croatia during their Australian Open second-round match on Thursday.—AFP

Djokovic rolls back years, Sinner supreme as Wawrinka makes history

MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic rolled back the years to reach the Australian Open third round on Thursday but Jannik Sinner, the man who has usurped him as king of Melbourne Park, showed why he is favourite to claim a hat-trick of titles as 40-year-old Stan Wawrinka survived an epic to make Grand Slam history.

Women's defending champion Madison Keys overcame a second-set wobble against Ashlyn Krueger to also advance while former champion Naomi Osaka toned down her outfit but not her power game as she also reached round three.

Iga Swiatek continued her quest to complete her career Grand Slam on a sunny but cooler day five, when the tournament fell briefly silent in the evening to remember the 15 people killed at Bondi Beach last month by gunmen who opened fire on a Jewish festival.

Fourth seed Djokovic, seeking a record-extending 11th Melbourne Park title and 25th Grand Slam trophy overall to break the deadlock with Margaret Court, eased past Italian qualifier Francesco Maestrelli 6-3, 6-2, 6-2.

The 38-year-old Serb maintained his steady grip on the second-round clash without needing to shift into top gear.

"I didn't know much about him (Maestrelli) until a few days ago, it happens more often than not these days," Djokovic said of his 23-year-old opponent.

He raced through the opening set and pounced again in the opening game of the second set to heap pressure on world number 141 Maestrelli.

The win was Djokovic's 399th in Grand Slams and his 101st in Melbourne, leaving him one shy of record-holder Roger Federer. Djokovic will next meet Botic van de Zandschulp.

There was something of a retro feel about day five in the men's singles with Wawrinka outlasting Arthur Gea 4-6, 6-3, 3-6, 7-5, 7-6 (10/3) to become the first player aged 40 or over to reach the men's third round at a Slam since Ken Rosewall at the Australian Open in 1978.

He was joined in the next round by another experienced campaigner in the 37-year-old Marin Cilic, who dispatched 21st seed Denis Shapovalov 6-4, 6-3, 6-2.

In Melbourne as a wildcard, Wawrinka pulled heroically through in four hours and 33 minutes against French qualifier Gea. The Swiss former champion is playing his last season before retiring and faces the American ninth seed Taylor Fritz next.

In 2009, Djokovic, Cilic and Wawrinka all reached round three and 17 years later they are still going strong.

The man to beat on blue Melbourne hard courts these days, however, is Sinner. He was supreme as he thumped home wild card James Duckworth 6-1, 6-4, 6-2 in the Rod Laver Arena evening session, banging down 18 aces in a dominant display.

Sinner, bidding to join Djokovic by becoming only the second man in the professional era to win three successive Australian Open titles, has now won 12 successive Tour-level matches without dropping a set and looks razor sharp.

"I know how much work I've put in so the body feels good and the mind is in a good moment," he said. The world number two will face American Eliot Spizzirri next.

Men's fifth seed Lorenzo Musetti won the battle of the Italians on Margaret Court Arena as he beat good friend Lorenzo Sonego 6-3, 6-3, 6-4 and will face Czech Tomas Machac next after he overpowered Greek 31st seed Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (7/5).

Eighth-seeded Ben Shelton had few issues against Australia's Dane Sweeny, the American claiming a 6-3, 6-2, 6-2 win to set up a third-round meeting with Valentin Vacherot, who defeated Australia's Rinky Hijikata in four sets.

SWITZERLAND'S Belinda Bencic in action during the second round match against Nikola Bartunkova of the Czech Republic on Thursday.—AFP

KEYS STUMBLES ON WAY TO WIN OVER KRUEGER

Keys, the ninth seed in the draw, notched up a 6-1, 7-5 win over fellow American Krueger but was less than convincing after powering her way through the opening set.

The defending champion allowed doubts to creep into her game in the second set, handing Krueger two breaks on serve with a succession of double faults before battling back to progress to the next round to face Karolina Pliskova.

Melbourne is where Keys made her Grand Slam breakthrough 12 months ago and since her return people have been asking her how confident she is about retaining the Daphne Akhurst Memorial Cup.

"Whether or not I do repeat it," she said, "I still get to keep Daphne at home!"

In another all-United States clash, sixth seed Jessica Pegula made light work of her doubles partner McCartney Kessler in a rapid 6-0, 6-2 win to set up a meeting with Russia's Oksana Selekhmeteva, who upset 2025 semi-finalist Paula Badosa 6-4, 6-4.

Another ruthless winner was Wimbledon runner-up Amanda Anisimova — 6-1, 6-4 against the Czech Katerina Siniakova — and the fourth seed will next face American compatriot Peyton Stearns.

Second seed Swiatek, who has won six major titles but never been successful in Melbourne, was in cruise control against Marie Bouzkova of the Czech Republic, 6-2, 6-3 as she shrugged off the sluggishness of her first-round match with a much more lively display.

"It felt great playing today, I felt more free than in the first round so I wanted to go for it," Swiatek said.

Osaka, champion in 2019 and 2021, ditched the parasol, veil and broad-brimmed hat for her walk-on against Romania's Sorana Cirstea but continued making waves in her jellyfish-inspired outfit, battling to a 6-3, 4-6, 6-2 win.

There was no love lost between the two players though with a frosty exchange at the net after match point with Cirstea upset by Osaka's antics. "[There were] apparently a lot of 'come ons' that she was angry about," Osaka said. "She's a great player. I think this was her last Australian Open. So sorry she was mad about it."

Fifth seed Elena Rybakina beat Varvara Gracheva in straight sets but 10th seed Belinda Benic was stunned by qualifier Nikola Bartunkova in three sets.—Agencies

NONTHABURI (Thailand): Pakistan captain Muhammad Hassaan Zafar Khan (R) vies for the ball with Bangladesh's Foayej Ahammed during their SAFF Futsal Championship match at the Nonthaburi Stadium on Thursday. Pakistan recorded a thumping 5-1 victory thanks to doubles by Ali Agha and Zaidullah Khan while Salar Ahmed Khan got their other goal. Four goals were scored in the last four minutes with Sri Lanka's Fayed Azim making it 2-1 in the 36th before Pakistan scored three times to seal three points. The victory saw Pakistan move into second place in the standings with 10 points from five matches, two points behind leaders Maldives who have a perfect record after four matches. Bangladesh are third with seven points from five matches while India — Pakistan's opponents in their final round-robin match on Monday — sit fourth with five points from four games. The team that finishes top after the final round of matches will be crowned champion. —Courtesy SAFF

Sri Lanka survive Overton scare to beat England in first ODI

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka overcame Jamie Overton's late assault to beat England by 19 runs in the opening One-day International in Colombo on Thursday.

Electing to bat, Sri Lanka posted a commanding 271-6 with Kusal Mendis leading their charge with an unbeaten 93.

England, with several players still smarting from their 4-1 Ashes hammering in Australia, were bowled out for 252 in 49.2 overs at the R Premadasa Stadium. Overton belted 34 off 17 balls but could not take England across the line.

Earlier, Sri Lanka got off to a decent start after Pathum Nissanka and Kamil Mishara combined in an opening stand of 50.

Sam Curran removed Nissanka for 21 to break the stand and Adil Rashid (3-44) bowled Mishara round the legs before Mendis anchored Sri Lanka's innings.

Janith Liyanage provided a quick 46 before Dunith Wellalage produced an unbeaten cameo of 25 off 12 balls to power the hosts to a strong total.

England's spin quartet of Rashid, Rehan Ahmed, Liam Dawson and Jacob Bethell bowled a combined 33 overs between them.

England lost Zak Crawley for six in the third over of the innings before Ben Duckett (62) and Joe Root (61) revived their chase with a stand of 117.

England were cruising at 129-1 in 27 overs before collapsing.

Jeffrey Vandersay dismissed Duckett before Dhananjaya de Silva dealt a bigger blow when he trapped Root lbw after successfully reviewing the original not-out decision.

Pramod Madushan bowled Jos Buttler for 19 but Overton refused to throw in the towel.

England's number nine hit two sixes and four fours before being undone by a Madushan full toss.

The second ODI of the three-match series is scheduled for Saturday.—Reuters

Scoreboard

SRI LANKA:
P. Nissanka c Dawson b Curran 21
K. Mishara b Rashid 27
K. Mendis not out 93
D. de Silva lbw b Rashid 10
C. Asalanka c Brook b Ahmed 17
J. Liyanage c&b Rashid 46
P. Rathnayake c Overton b Dawson 12
D. Wellalage not out 25
EXTRAS (LB-10, W-10) 20
TOTAL (for six wickets, 50 overs) 271
FALL OF WICKETS: 1-50 (Nissanka), 2-54 (Mishara), 3-97 (de Silva, 4-124 (Asalanka), 5-212 (Liyanage), 6-239 (Rathnayake)
DID NOT BAT: P. Madushan, J. Vandersay, A. Fernando
BOWLING: Overton 9-0-66-0 (2w), Curran 8-0-40-1 (1w), Dawson 10-1-31-1 (1w), Rashid 10-0-44-3, Ahmed 10-0-61-1 (1w), Bethell 3-0-19-0
ENGLAND:
Z. Crawley c Mendis b Fernando 6
B. Duckett lbw b Vandersay 62
J. Root lbw b de Silva 61
J. Bethell st Mendis b Wellalage 15
H. Brook st Mendis b Asalanka 6
J. Buttler b Madushan 19
S. Curran c&b Wellalage 5
R. Ahmed c Wellalage b Vandersay 27
J. Overton c Wellalage b Madushan 34
L. Dawson c de Silva b Madushan 2
A. Rashid not out 0
EXTRAS (LB-5, NB-1, W-9) 15
TOTAL (all out, 49.2 overs) 252
FALL OF WICKETS: 1-12 (Crawley), 2-129 (Duckett), 3-144 (Root), 4-157 (Brook), 5-159 (Bethell), 6-165 (Curran), 7-203 (Ahmed), 8-211 (Buttler), 9-213 (Dawson)
BOWLING: Fernando 8-1-64-1 (3w, 1nb), Madushan 5.2-0-39-3 (4w), de Silva 8-0-22-1, Wellalage 10-0-41-2, Asalanka 7-0-33-1 (1w), Vandersay 10-0-39-2 (1w), Mishara 1-0-9-0
RESULT: Sri Lanka won by 19 runs.

SRI LANKAN batter Kusal Mendis plays a shot as England wicket-keeper Jos Buttler looks on during the the first ODI at the R. Premadasa International Stadium on Thursday.—AFP